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ABSTRACT

This report presents Tidewater Community College's (TCC's) (Virginia) 1998 graduate survey study. Approximately half of the graduates attended another college or university prior to enrolling at TCC. A small portion enrolled directly from high school. Almost three-fourths of the graduates were working either full- or part-time while enrolled, and 20% were on military active duty or were discharged from the military service. The primary reasons students gave for attending TCC are: low tuition, a location close to home, and courses/curriculum of interest. After graduation, 73% of the graduates were employed either full- or part-time. Approximately three out of five graduates were working for the same company that employed them during their enrollment, and almost a third of this group received a promotion or pay raise after earning their degree. Approximately half of the graduates continued their education after graduation in a four-year institution or were enrolled full-time. Since 1994, the percentage of graduates who felt they regained or made progress in developing basic computer skills has increased from 71% to 85%. Between 80-90% of the graduates indicated they were adequately prepared in writing, speaking, and math skills, defining and solving problems, understanding written information, and thinking creatively. Graduates were overwhelmingly satisfied with the TCC experience. (VWC)



Tidewater Community College

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1998 GRADUATE SURVEY STUDY

Office of Institutional Research

August 1999



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1998 TCC GRADUATE SURVEY STUDY

Executive Summary

During fall 1998, the Office of Institutional Research surveyed 1,568 TCC graduates who graduated in May 1998. The biennial survey is conducted for purposes of program assessment and to gain knowledge of demographic, enrollment, attendance, employment, educational, and attitudinal data about TCC graduates. Highlights of the study are provided below.

- Approximately half of the graduates attended another college or university prior to enrolling at TCC. A small portion (17%) enrolled directly from high school. Almost three-fourths of the graduates were working either full- or part-time while enrolled, and 20% were on active duty or discharged from the military service.
- The primary reasons for attending TCC have remained the same for the last 20 years: low tuition (74%), close to home (64%), and courses/curriculum of interest (65%). The majority (56%) of respondents indicated their primary goal was to obtain an associate degree for transfer.
- After graduation, 73% of the graduates were employed either full-time or part-time. Almost half of those employed full-time earned over \$26,000 per year. Approximately 3 out of 5 graduates were working for the same company that employed them during their enrollment, and almost a third of this group received a promotion or pay raise after earning their degree. Sixty-nine percent of the employed graduates were working in a curriculum-related field and 97% of this group indicated TCC preparation for employment was good to excellent. For graduates employed in a job unrelated to their curriculum, the primary reason cited was that they were already working for their present employer before completing the program.
- Approximately half (49%) of the graduates continued their education after graduation. For those who continued, 74% enrolled in a four-year college/university and the majority (56%) enrolled full-time. Most were classified as juniors or seniors and 75% enrolled in a TCC-related curriculum. Ninety percent rated their performance as expected or higher than expected after transfer. Eighty-five percent cited TCC's preparation as satisfactory or excellent for continuing their education.
- Since 1994 the percentage of graduates who felt they gained or made progress in developing basic computer skills has increased from 71% to 85%. As one student noted, "I use the information I learned in my computer class at TCC on a daily basis at my present job." Between 80-90% of the graduates indicated they were adequately prepared in writing, speaking, and math skills, defining and solving problems, understanding written information, and thinking creatively.
- Graduates are overwhelmingly satisfied with their TCC experience: 95% would recommend the same curriculum and 99% would recommend the college, in general, to others.
- TCC's success in regard to the mission of workforce development is best described in the words of one 1998 graduate: "As a direct result of my training I have gone from working odd jobs to a professional position in medical transcription for a national company where I receive health benefits, competitive pay, and a 401K and stock option."

1998 GRADUATE SURVEY STUDY

INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of the 1998 Tidewater Community College Graduate Survey Study is to provide a gauge of student satisfaction with the TCC educational experience and to identify areas in need of improvement. The study contains data pertaining to the 1,568 graduates of the class of 1998. It includes a brief summary of demographic profile data for all students who graduated in May 1998 as well as demographic, enrollment, attendance, employment, educational, and attitudinal data obtained from respondents to the 1998 Graduate Survey. In addition, the Assessment Appendices include five-year summaries and general education data for assessment.

METHODOLOGY

The graduate survey was sent approximately six months after graduation to all 1998 graduates. The survey consisted of three mailings. The first mailing contained a letter of explanation, questionnaire, and a self-addressed return envelope. Nine days later a reminder postcard was sent for the second mailing. Three weeks after the initial mailing, the third mailing, which contained a letter, questionnaire, and self-addressed return envelope, was completed.

REPRESENTATION

The Office of Institutional Research received 722 responses from the mailings for a response rate of 46%, which was slightly higher than the 43% response rate in 1996. The response rate distribution by campus was as follows: Chesapeake-42%, Portsmouth-39%, Moss-38%, Virginia Beach-51%. In terms of degree earned, 50% or more of those receiving an Associate in Arts (AA) or an Associate in Applied Science (AAS) Degree responded to the survey. Forty-seven percent and 36% of graduates earning an Associate in Science (AS) Degree and a certificate, respectively, replied.

The resulting sample developed from the mailings is representative of the total 1998 TCC graduate population with respect to demographic composition. Differences between demographics of the respondents to the 1998 Graduate Survey and those of the total 1998 TCC graduate population were generally six percent or less. Respondents represented 56 curricula, as compared to 58 curricula represented by all graduates. There were no respondents from the Administration of Justice or Floriculture curricula. Comparisons of 1998 survey demographics with those of the total 1998 graduate class are shown in Table 1 on page three. Note that no diplomas were awarded in 1998.

Table 1
Comparison of Respondents With Graduates

	Respondents		All Graduates	
	N	Percent	N	Percent
By Campus				
Chesapeake	93	12.9%	222	14.2%
Moss	28	3.9%	73	4.6%
Portsmouth	170	23.5%	436	27.8%
Virginia Beach	431	59.7%	837	53.4%
Total	722	100.0%	1568	100.0%
By Award				
AA	30	4.2%	55	3.5%
AS	315	43.6%	667	42.5%
AAS	251	34.8%	500	31.9%
Certificate	126	17.4%	346	22.1%
Total	722	100.0%	1568	100.0%
By Gender				
Male	287	39.8%	699	44.6%
Female	435	60.2%	869	55.4%
Total	722	100.0%	1568	100.0%
By Race				
			1134	
White	544	75.4%		72.3%
Black	105	14.5%	265	16.9%
Other	73	10.1%	169	10.8%
Total	722	100.0%	1568	100.0%
By Age				
17 and under	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
18-21	47	6.5%	88	5.6%
22-24	97	13.4%	230	14.7%
25-29	133	18.4%	323	20.6%
30-34	115	15.9%	265	16.9%
35-44	199	27.6%	426	27.2%
45-54	108	15.0%	191	12.2%
55-64	23	3.2%	43	2.7%
65 and over	0	0.0%	2	0.1%
Total	722	100.0%	1568	100.0%

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE SUMMARY FOR ALL 1998 GRADUATES

The number of 1998 graduates increased by 120 students, or 8%, over the number of 1997 graduates. According to Figure 1, the 1998 graduating class was the third largest in college history.

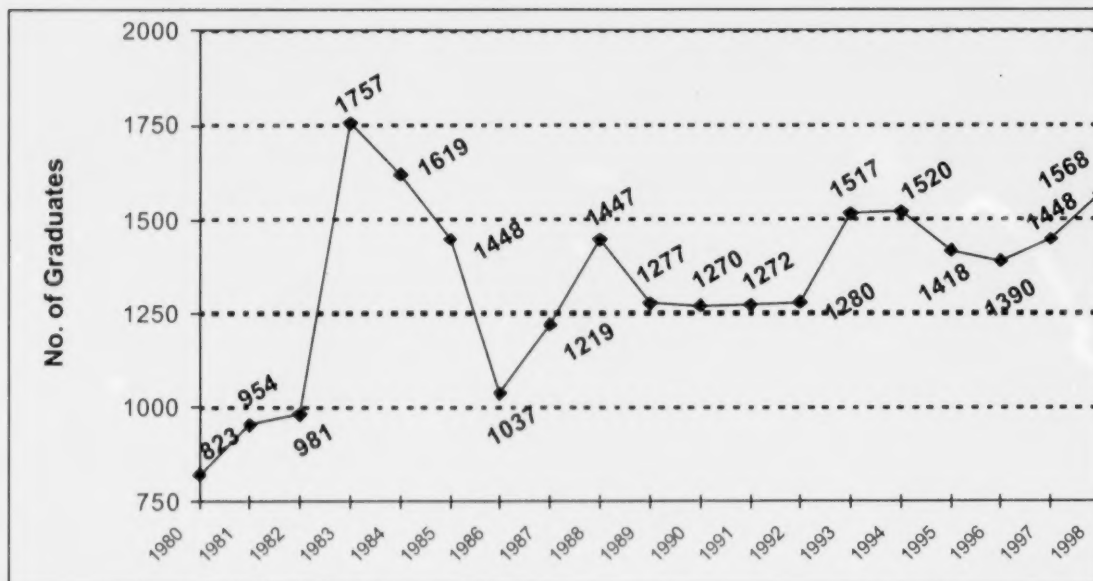


Figure 1 Total Number of Graduates 1980-1998

The breakdown of 1998 graduates by campus remained almost the same as 1997: the Virginia Beach Campus accounted for more than half of the graduates with 53%, Portsmouth 28%, Chesapeake 14%, and Moss 5%. Portsmouth experienced a 1% decrease in the number of graduates from 1997 to 1998. The new Moss Campus accounted for 5% of the graduates both in 1997 and 1998.

Occupational/technical awards were presented to 54% of the graduates and college

transfer degrees were awarded to 46%. Compared to 1997, the number of transfer degrees awarded increased by 17%, continuing the trend of increasing interest in transfer programs. Campus analyses indicated college transfer degrees were awarded to 27% of Portsmouth graduates, 50% of Chesapeake graduates, 54% of Virginia Beach graduates, and 63% of the graduates at the new Moss Campus. The majority of AA graduates (62%), AS graduates (60%), and AAS graduates (51%) completed their requirements within five years or less. Over half (51%) of the certificates were awarded within 3 years of initial enrollment.

College-wide, the proportion of female graduates (55%) continues to exceed that of male graduates (45%); however, the proportion of male graduates has been steadily increasing while the proportion of female graduates has been declining. In addition, slightly more than one-fourth (28%) of the total 1998 graduates was minority and 72% was Caucasian. Analysis by age indicated the majority (59%) were 30 years of age or older, with the largest proportion (27%) in the 35-44 age group.

Analysis of student course work indicated that close to 25% of the graduates enrolled in developmental English, while 43% completed a developmental math course. For those who enrolled in developmental English, the largest portion completed a writing course (23%) and a much smaller percentage completed a reading course (7%). Student development classes (orientation) were analyzed as well. Of the 1998 graduates who first enrolled during the 1994/95 academic year, 25% enrolled in the required student development course during their first year. Eighteen percent waited until their last year at the college to enroll in an orientation class.

ENROLLMENT AND ATTENDANCE PATTERNS

Over half of the respondents (54%) graduated within four years of their initial enrollment. A majority of Portsmouth and Virginia Beach graduates (54% and 56%, respectively) required four years or less, while less than half of the Moss and Chesapeake campus graduates (39% and 48%) were able to complete their requirements in four years or less. Collegewide, the majority of respondents (59%) attended day classes. A majority of respondents at Chesapeake, Portsmouth, and Virginia Beach campuses followed this pattern; however, at the Moss Campus, the majority (57%) enrolled primarily in evening classes. A slight majority of graduates (52%) attended the college part-time. Virginia Beach was the only campus with a majority attending full-time (51%).

The other campus full-time attendance rates were as follows: Chesapeake-48%, Portsmouth-44%, and Moss-39%.

The proportion of respondents (50%) who attended another college/university prior to enrolling at TCC has increased steadily since 1994 (1994 - 46%, 1996 - 48%).

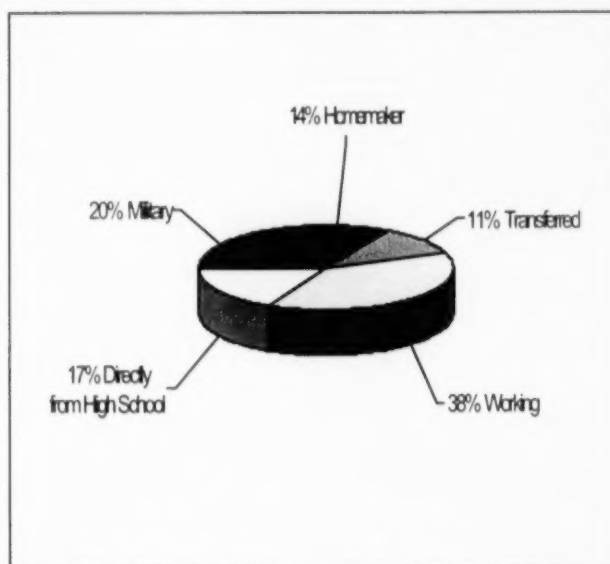


Figure 2 Employment Status of 1998 Graduates During Their Enrollment

The Portsmouth and Moss campuses tended to enroll students without prior higher education experience, while the Virginia Beach and Chesapeake graduates were more likely to have

enrolled at another college prior to TCC. From Figure 2, one can see that a relatively small proportion (17%) exemplified the traditional student, enrolling directly from high school. Thirty-eight percent enrolled while working, 20% were either active duty military or discharged from the military, 14% enrolled while working as a homemaker and raising a family, and 11% transferred from another community college or a four-year school.

Primary reasons for attending TCC were the same as those given in previous years: low tuition (74%), closeness to home (64%), and courses/curriculum of interest (65%). Thirty percent or more of the respondents also indicated that small classes, evening offerings, personal improvement, and obtaining a promotion were significant considerations in selecting TCC.

Over one-half of the respondents (55%) indicated their primary goal was to obtain an associate degree for college transfer. Occupational/technical training was listed as a primary goal by 39% of the respondents. Figure 3 illustrates the graduates' primary goals for both the college and individual campuses.

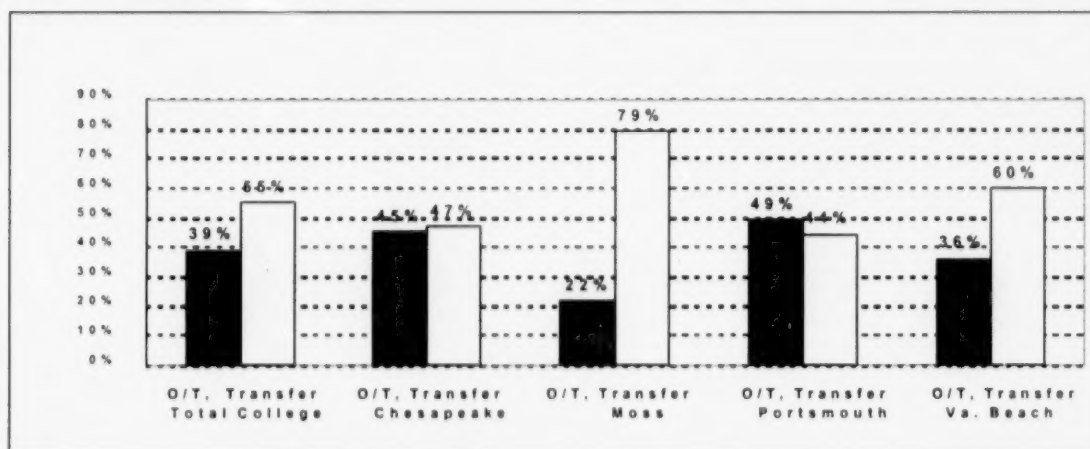


Figure 3 Primary Goals for Attendance by Campus

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Both the Moss Campus and Virginia Beach Campus reflect the total college distribution with the majority of respondents attending TCC for college transfer credits (79% and 60%, respectively). The Chesapeake and Portsmouth campus respondents were more evenly divided in their goals: Chesapeake showed 45% occupational/technical and 47% college transfer, and Portsmouth showed 48% occupational/technical and 44% college transfer. More than 9 out of 10 respondents (93%) indicated their experience at TCC contributed to the fulfillment of their goals (65% to a great extent, 28% to some extent).

EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION

Almost three-fourths of the respondents worked either full-time (45%) or part-time (29%) while attending TCC. Compared to the 1996 graduates, a larger portion worked full-time while attending the college and a smaller portion worked part-time. Note that the full-time employment figures cited above do not include respondents who were full-time military (7% of respondents). Nineteen percent were unemployed while attending TCC, a decrease of 2% from 1996. Of those employed full-time in 1998, 53% indicated their employment was related to their curriculum at TCC (26% directly related and 27% somewhat related).

With respect to current employment after graduation, 73% of the respondents were employed either full-time (54%) or part-time (19%). The proportion of respondents who were unemployed (20%) has remained almost constant since 1992. The percentages of students employed full-time both during college enrollment and after graduation are illustrated in Figure 4. As more TCC students graduate with the goal to transfer to a four-year college or university,

the percentage of graduates employed full-time after graduation has declined.

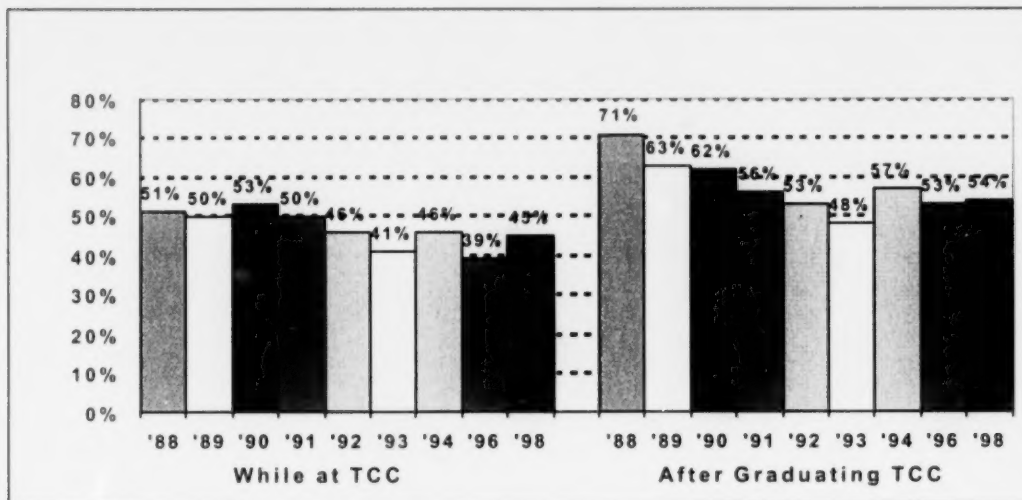


Figure 4 Full-time employment while at TCC and after graduating, 1998-1999

Excluding military, 47% of the currently full-time employed respondents earned more than \$26,000, 43% between \$11,000 and \$25,999, and 4% less than \$11,000. Salaries have increased for graduates since 1996 as evidenced by the fact that 7% more respondents earned more than \$26,000 in 1998 than in 1996. Of those currently part-time employed, 61% earned less than \$11,000.

Of those employed after graduation, approximately three out of five respondents were working for the same company that employed them during their attendance at TCC. Of these, 29% received a promotion or pay raise after obtaining their degree. More than two-thirds (69%) of the respondents who were employed indicated they were currently working in a field related to their curriculum at TCC. Of those employed in a related field, 97% indicated that their preparation at TCC was either excellent (39%), satisfactory (40%), or good (18%).

Approximately three out of five of the respondents who worked full-time indicated that their curriculum at TCC helped, to a great extent or to some extent, develop new skills and upgrade performance and expertise. About one-third of those who worked part-time expressed the same sentiment.

Thirty-three percent of the respondents worked in jobs unrelated to their TCC curriculum. The primary reason given by almost half (43%) of this group was that they were already working with their present employer before they completed the program. This was especially true for those employed full-time (53%). Other reasons cited included not sufficiently qualified in the field (18%), changing career goals (12%), and employed as active duty military (10%).

TRANSFER TO OTHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

The proportion of respondents continuing their education after graduation continued to climb: 46% in 1994, 47% in 1996, and 49% in 1998. Of the 1998 respondents who continued their education, 74% were attending a four-year college or university and 21% were attending a two-year college. Slightly over half (56%) enrolled full-time, and 44% enrolled part-time. The majority (59%) of those who continued their education were classified as juniors, and 17% were classified as seniors. Three-fourths of the respondents who continued their education at a four-year college or university and over half (55%) at a two-year college enrolled in the same or related curriculum as the one completed at TCC.

When asked to rate their performance at their current college or university, the majority of respondents (55%) indicated it was as expected. Thirty-five percent of the respondents rated their performance as higher or much higher than expected. In addition, 9% of the respondents indicated they were performing at a lower than expected level.

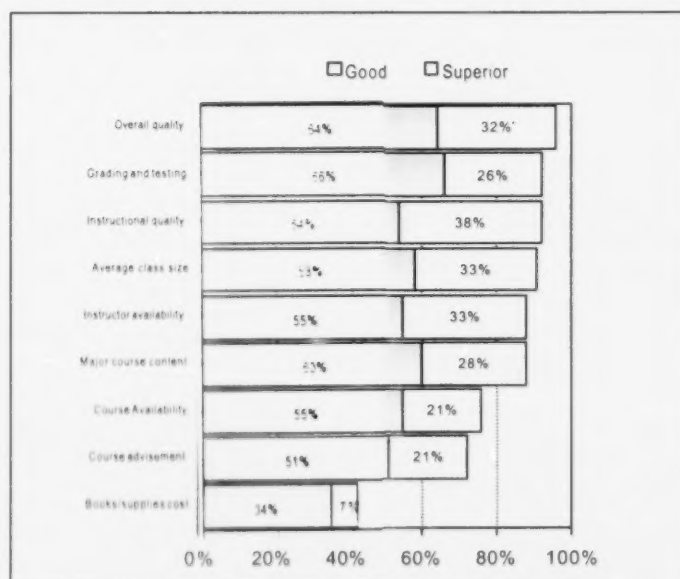
Eighty-five percent of respondents continuing their education indicated that courses completed at TCC provided excellent or satisfactory preparation for continuing their education (37% excellent, 48% satisfactory). Students who continued at a two-year college felt somewhat more prepared (88% excellent or satisfactory preparation) than their counterparts attending a four-year institution (83% excellent or satisfactory preparation). Respondents at four-year colleges or universities who cited excellent or satisfactory preparation at TCC were distributed across campuses as follows: Moss-88%, Portsmouth-85%, Virginia Beach-84%, and Chesapeake-71%.

EVALUATION OF INSTRUCTION AND STUDENT SERVICES

Survey findings relative to the quality of instruction received by the respondents while attending Tidewater Community College are summarized in Figure 5. Overall quality of instruction at Tidewater

Community College was rated as either good or superior by a large majority of respondents (96%).

This was slightly higher than the two previous surveys where 95% of the respondents rated instruction good or superior.



When judged in terms of their major curriculum, 92% of the respondents gave good or superior ratings to the quality of instruction and 88% rated course content as superior or good. Faculty were rated in terms of availability

Figure 5 Superior/Good Ratings of Instruction

and course advisement. As in 1996, eighty-eight percent of the 1998 respondents rated instructor availability as good or superior (55% rating good and 33% as superior). Faculty advising was considered good or superior by 72% of respondents, a 2% increase over 1996. However, 25% rated faculty advising as fair or poor. Classroom size was rated good or superior by 91% of respondents. Survey results showed grading and testing were considered good or superior by 92% of the respondents, 26% of which rated them as superior. Cost of books and supplies continued to be the lowest rated area with less than half (41%) of respondents rating it satisfactory and 58% giving it a fair (45%) or poor (13%) rating.

Of the nine student services listed in the 1998 Graduate Survey, four were marked as "Don't Know/Never Used" by more than half of the respondents.

These were: Co-op Program (80%), Veterans Affairs (73%), Student Activities (63%), and Financial Aid (51%). The most utilized student services were Registration (98%), Admissions

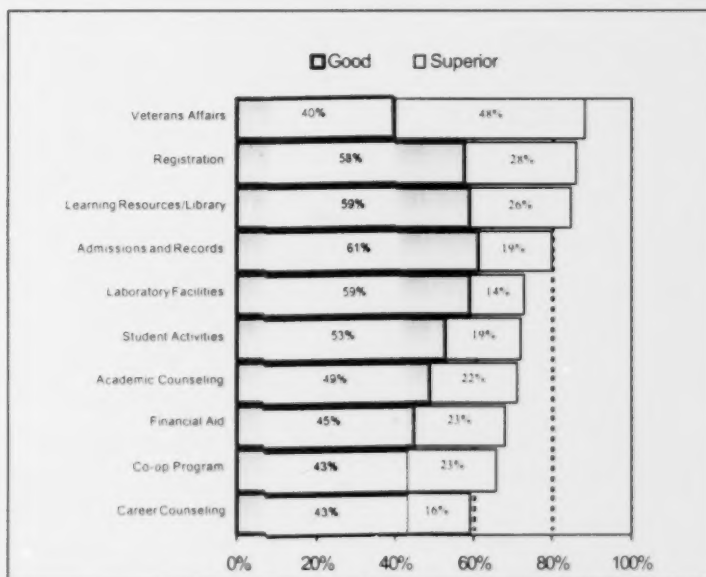


Figure 6 Superior/Good Ratings of Student Services For Those who Have Used Services

and Records (97%), Learning Resources/Library (88%),

Academic Counseling (88%), and Laboratory Facilities (77%). The highest rated student services, based upon ratings provided by those respondents who used the services, were Veterans Affairs, Registration, Learning Resources/Library, and Admissions and Records.

All four of these services, with the exception of Veterans Affairs, were also some of the most utilized student services as mentioned above. Each of these was rated either good or superior by more than 80% of the respondents. Academic Counseling, Student Activities, and Laboratory Facilities were rated good or superior by more than 70% of the respondents. Career Services continued as the lowest rated service with 41% of respondents giving a fair (30%) or poor (11%) rating. In addition, more than 25% of respondents gave a fair or poor rating to Financial Aid (32%), Academic Counseling (29%), Student Activities (28%), and Laboratory Facilities (27%). These results are summarized in Figure 6.

Respondents were asked how adequately Tidewater Community College's academic program prepared them in the following areas: technical job skills and job-related knowledge, writing, under-standing written information, speaking skills, mathematical skills, defining and solving problems, and thinking creatively. Responses in all areas, except job-related knowledge and solving problems, indicated that 1998 respondents felt themselves

to be equally, or better, prepared than those of 1996.

Figure 7 shows that between 84% and 92% of the respondents were adequately or more than adequately prepared in each area listed except two. The area in which respondents felt most prepared was understanding written information where 92% of the respondents said they were

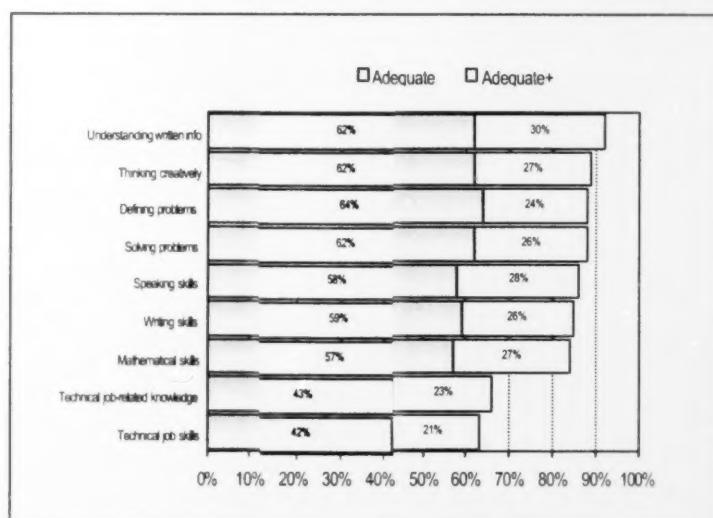


Figure 7 Percentage Who Evaluated Academic Preparation as Adequate or More Than Adequate

adequately or more than adequately prepared. In contrast, the two areas receiving the lowest ratings were technical job skill preparation (63% adequate) and technical job-related knowledge (66% adequate).

The respondents were asked to rate how well the attributes of cooperation, initiative, dependability, and decision-making were applied in their professional behaviors. All attributes were overwhelmingly rated as adequate. Dependability continued to rate highest with 99% adequate, followed by cooperation with others (97%), and initiative and decision-making skills (96% each). Two attributes, cooperation with others and dependability, showed no change from 1996. Respondents felt they had slightly more initiative and decision-making skills than in 1996.

Based upon their experiences at TCC, 90% of the 1998 graduate respondents indicated they had made progress to either a great extent or some extent in two areas, developing the ability to think critically (not just memorizing) and developing a sense of tolerance and respect for others. Eighty-eight percent felt they could write more effectively. In all other areas, such as developing a sense of ethical and social responsibility, speaking effectively, developing library skills, developing a sense of well-being, and developing creative abilities, most (78% - 85%) felt they had gained or made progress. Implementation of computer competency requirements for graduation has had a positive impact on knowledge and skills in this area. Since 1994, the percentage of respondents who felt they gained or made progress in developing basic computer skills has increased from 71% to 85% in 1998. As one student noted, "I use the information I learned in my computer class at TCC on a daily basis at my present job."

Respondents are overwhelmingly satisfied with their TCC education as evidenced by the fact that 99% would recommend the college to others. More specifically, and representing an

increase over 1996, a vast majority of respondents to the 1998 Graduate Survey indicated they would recommend TCC to someone wishing to enter the same major curriculum that they completed (95% in 1998 compared to 92% in 1996).

CONCLUSION

A historic look over the past twenty years shows a shift from a graduate population focused on job training to one focused on transfer to a four-year institution and lifelong learning. Twenty years ago, less than 25% of the TCC graduates obtained a college transfer degree, compared to 46% in 1998. The opportunity to pay low tuition rates has always been cited as the primary reason for TCC enrollment. As tuition rates have increased throughout higher education and better transfer agreements have been initiated, more students are taking advantage of the community college to obtain the first two years of a four-year degree.

From the survey results it is apparent that TCC students continue to face the many commitments that characterize non-traditional students: job, family, education, to name a few. The fact that 99% would recommend the college to someone else is an affirmation that the college provides an excellent beginning to lifelong learning and plays an important role in workforce development of the Hampton Roads area. One non-traditional graduate succinctly described the value of a TCC education: "As a direct result of my training I have gone from working odd jobs to a professional position in medical transcription for a national company where I receive health benefits, competitive pay, and a 401K and stock options."